

## Pakistan is a Heaven for Minority: Myth or Reality?

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**Abstract:** *This study focuses on analyzing Pakistan's political and social approaches toward its Christian minority in the light of "The Golden Legend" (2017) – a novel by Nadeem Aslam. Aslam is a member of a Pakistani diaspora community, this novel seems to posit that the government of Pakistan cannot safeguard the rights of religious minorities, and they are vulnerable socially, economically, and politically. Textual and contextual analysis shows that religious extremism of certain groups of people and the politics of identity that discriminates non-Muslims against Muslims has led to severe oppression of these people in the country. The study identifies social and political practices through which Christian minorities have been discriminated against. It also highlights their prevailing unfortunate situation in Pakistan and presents a deeper understanding of how the members of the Christian community are treated as subalterns who do not have a voice in Pakistan and how the rights of Christian minorities are violated, and the role politics play in the marginalization of these minorities. Nevertheless, it also points out how the novel provides a ray of hope for humanity to move forward; as Nadeem Aslam, commenting on the novel, quotes Shelley:*

*"Hope creates from its own wreck, the thing it contemplates"*

*Therefore, this study through the textual analysis of the novel and the contextual investigation serves as a contemplation of the mess created by religiopolitical activities.*

**Key Words:** Minorities, marginalization, Christians, religious politics, extremism

### Introduction

The twentieth century has been termed "the century of human rights protection," as it is a period marked by the awakening of human rights, particularly the protection of minority rights. Since the occupation of Afghanistan by the Taliban, this issue has become all the more important to international communities, as the world feared that the Taliban will spread their power to neighboring countries, like Bangladesh, Iran, and Pakistan. International Communities became active on the issue of human rights,

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more specifically religious minority right in these countries in the beginning of the twenty-first century. Pakistan in this context was considered the most vulnerable as it is a country made in the name of Islam and the chances were that Islamic ideology can be easily misused by the radical groups in the country. Islam was not only at the core of the political struggle for freedom, but has also remained the most essential part of political discourse since independence. This Islamic identity of the state was considered a threat to religious minorities in the country. A state where the people of the majority religion would want to have their own social, political and cultural norms in accordance with their religious ideals could create a social, economic, and political dilemma for the religious minorities in this country.

Interestingly, the constitution of Pakistan uses the term ‘minority’ on several occasions, but it does not clearly define the concept of minorities. According to the stance taken by successive federal governments, however, the identity of minorities in Pakistan is based on their religion (Rehman, 2019). According to surveys conducted by Minority Rights Group (2016), approximately 5% of non-Muslim minorities reside in Pakistan including Christians, Hindus, Sikhs, Ahmadis, and scheduled castes.

However, identifying oneself through religious beliefs has become the predominating phenomenon that can be noticed in most research since the 1990s. Hutnik (1985), among the early researchers, was one of the pioneers to prove that religion was the most important identity marker of the Muslims of South Asia. In his survey, 80% of Muslim identities were listed, indicating religion as the most important identity item. This research involved mainly South Asian Muslims and mostly the Pakistani community. Similarly, the Home Office Citizenship Survey of 2001 also identified that religion is the second most important factor after the family for Muslims to describe themselves (O’Beirne, 2004).

Likewise, politics of identity is seen as a major tool through which majority groups can easily legitimize the persecution of minorities. Identity politics is based on people’s perceptions of and interests in various social groups, as well as their political stances. The aspects of identity such as race, nationality, religion, culture, ethnicity, class, language, and dialect that shape political ideas are included in it. The term was first used in the late twentieth century, during the Civil Rights Era, by a minority group to form an alliance with members of the majority group.

Dixit (2015) in her research on identity politics and its conflict in Pakistan, asserts that the struggle for power and resources and the allocation and distribution of these resources is the main concern of politics; which makes the identity formation process a core political activity. She further claims that without identity no individual, group of individuals, or community can be a subject or object of action, in other words, the “identity of a group makes political actions possible” (Dixit, 2015). In the case of Pakistan, civil-military subtleties and Islamist ideologies in state affairs mainly shape the politics of this country. This has resulted in a constant battle for power among politicians, military organizations, and religious groups. These forces, sometimes individually and sometimes in alliance among themselves,

have taken control of Pakistani society, politics, and economy.

In this scenario, the novel *The Golden Legend* (2017) is an effort to present the aspects of identity politics and Islamic extremism in Pakistani society. Nadeem Aslam through the characters of the Christian community like Lily, Helen, Seraphina, and Nargis (Margret) exposes how the people of religious minorities have been living on the margins of mainstream society. Through characters like major Burhan and other military and police personnel, the novelist reveals how power is exerted for the sake of political gains and how these forces use identity politics in manipulating an already marginalized group. The characters representing religious militants reveal the power that is exerted by Islamic radicals in ostracizing this already suppressed group of society.

### **I.1 Problem Statement:**

The main argument of this research is that in Pakistan Islamist forces and religious identity, and politics are two of the main causes of the political, social, and economic marginalization of religious minorities. This study critically analyzes Nadeem Aslam's novel *The Golden Legend* (2017) to determine how identity politics and Islamic radicalism cause political, social, and economic victimization of a religious minority in Pakistan.

### **I.2 Research Questions:**

The study will focus on the following aspects of the novel:

1. How does the novel portray religious minorities in Pakistan as Subalterns?
2. How does the novel present the idea of the "construction of truth" in identity politics?

### **I.3 Research Objectives:**

The following are the objectives of my research:

1. To analyze the novel from Spivak's subalterns' perspective.
2. To identify the forces responsible for generating and manipulating identity politics in the novel.

### **I.4 Significance of the Study:**

Even after colonial control, racial subalternity appears to have ramifications. The term "race" has been replaced with "ethnicity" in post-colonial studies to account for human heterogeneity in terms of culture, customs, social patterns, and lineage (Ashcroft, 2002). Ashcroft enumerates the significance of "race" as "The use of race as the dominating category of daily discrimination and prejudice remains a key and inevitable 'truth' of modern life" (p. 207).

Despite the fact that today people are aware of their basic human and citizenship rights and the freedom to choose the rulers of their nation, some natives are treated as second-class citizens in their own country, and this subjection is justified by racism. Pakistan, for example, is a society that is multi-religious, multi-cultural, multi-linguistic, and multi-ethnic. Although the official position on the

presence of religious, linguistic, and ethnic minorities is disputed, Pakistan's minorities can essentially be divided into two categories: ethnic and linguistic minorities and religious minorities. Though the term "minority" appears several times in the Islamic Republic of Pakistan's 1973 Constitution, it is not defined (Rais, 2004). All minorities in Pakistan are religious, according to successive federal administrations, and no ethnic, linguistic, or indigenous peoples exist (Rehman, 2019). Approximately 10% of religious minorities live in Pakistan. These minorities include Hindus, Christians, Sikhs, Ahmadis, and scheduled castes. The majority of minorities are impoverished and illiterate, and hence socially and economically marginalized (Rais, 2004).

Recent critical and scholarly attention has highlighted the issues of political identities, rights, and discrimination of minorities in Pakistan. In this context *The Golden Legend* (2017) as Nadeem Aslam himself said talks about politics especially Eastern politics – "everything from an act of kindness to decency has become a political act" (Naeem, 2009). Therefore, the research paper on this novel, *The Golden Legend* (2017), in the context of minorities and politics of religion is timely and directly relevant to the international community and Human Rights Organizations' interests in South Asia in general and Pakistan in particular.

This paper presents a deeper understanding of how the rights of Christian minorities are violated and the role politics play in the marginalization of these minorities. Nevertheless, it also points out how the novel provides a ray of hope for humanity to move forward; as Nadeem Aslam, commenting on the novel, quotes Shelley, "Hope creates from its own wreck, the thing it contemplates" (Zakaria, August 23, 2017). So, the paper through the analysis of the novel serves as a contemplation of the mess created by these religiopolitical movements.

### **Literature Review**

The work on religious, ethnic, social, sexual, and economic minorities has gained momentum in the twenty-first century throughout the world. In South Asia and the Middle East, where the dominant majority groups play important role in ostracizing the minorities of these societies, are particularly focused on the literature of these countries.

In his research on religious minorities in the Middle East, Hosseini (2018), for example, shows how Islamic State and Islamic terrorist groups have caused the deaths, displacements, and legal, sociological, and economical marginalization of minorities groups. In his research on the Kaka'i in Iraq, Hosseini shows how Kaka'i community portrayed themselves as Muslims in order to avoid being discriminated against on religious grounds.

On the other hand, Dalits – the untouchables – in Indian society are becoming more aware of their marginalized place inside the caste system in India (Pardeep, et al., 2014). Their literature involves embarrassment and suffering suffered in the Indian social framework's culture and subcultures. Dalit autobiographies, such as Karukku's *Trauma of Caste* (2000) in Tamil and Chauhan's *Tiraskrit* (vol. I,

2002) in Hindi, and Jataw's *Mara Safar Aur Meri Manzil* (2000) in Urdu, criticize conventional literary views in supporting the immoral and illogical legacy of Dalit persecution, all in the name of the Indian social structure. Similarly, Valmiki's autobiographical novel *Joothan* (2008) shows that the writer's psyche bears serious wounds as a result of living a life as a marginalized and dilitized victim of Indian caste society (Kadun, 2014).

Scholars and academics, on the other hand, are highly polarized on the status of Pakistan's religious minorities. On the one hand, academics such as Majid (2014) and Chaudhury (1956) think that Pakistan's religious minorities have the same status as the authoritarian religious majority. They say that Christians, amongst many other communities, have been given a much better chance to contribute to society's progress, and that Muslims in Pakistan are well aware of these religious minorities' services on a social, cultural, and economic level. However, religious minorities, have been consistently sidelined in the country as a result of political and constitutional reforms, according to experts like Riaz and Wakil (2015). They accuse Islamic extremist organizations of marginalization of minority groups by employing systemic violence against them, particularly the Christian group, but Zakria (2004) and Raina (2014) believe that it is the failure of the democratic leaders. They think military dictatorships, have been more tolerant to the people in minority than other governments.

Other scholars, including Malik (2002) and Ahmed (2017), blame recent violence against religious minorities on constitutional reforms made by Zia Ul Haq – particularly the amendments to the Pakistan Penal Code – and undemocratic rulers in Pakistan.

### ***Inherited Problems from Colonial Rulers***

The postcolonial theory was introduced to challenge the long-held assumptions of the Europeans to prove the Eastern as barbaric, uncivilized, unethical, incapable, and fascist. However, some postcolonial philosophers and writers started observing the 'pitfalls of this national consciousness' (Fanon, 1961); moreover, others, besides criticizing the independent postcolonial states, started glorifying Western beliefs and theories of governance and political and social structures. These authors brought forth the issues such as inequality, oppression, and dictatorship in these states through literature. These authors not only highlighted the incompetency of the leaders of these states but also pointed out how their leaders have taken the role of the managers of the Western enterprise in suppressing the underprivileged groups of their societies. Moreover, these authors reveal how the leaders of these postcolonial states, following the footsteps of their Western masters, are applying divide-and-rule policies in their states.

Fanon in his celebrated book, *The Wretched of the Earth* (1961) claims that besides leaving the shattered economy and incompetent leadership for the newly independent states, the most important legacy of the West is the tribal and racial differences giving rise to religious rivalries. Fanon, giving an example of Africa, pointing out how the unity of these nationals is shattered by introducing the racial

and religious differences: 'in big towns on the level of administrative classes, we will observe the coming to grips of the two great revealed religions, Islam and Catholicism' (Fanon, 1961).

Secondly, Fanon asserts that Westerns not only sowed the seeds of racial and ethnic differences to weaken the social structure in these states; but also left a powerless and fake parliamentary system. For Fanon 'single party is the modern form of the dictatorship' and 'such a dictatorship does not go very far' (p. 78). The political leadership, instead of inspiring confidence among its people, tries to impose itself and 'jostles people and bullies them' and an environment of continual danger is created for its citizens. Such a dictatorship cannot go very far because of financial constraints; therefore, the leaders look towards their Western masters 'who count on their obliging compliance' (p. 121). These Western powers, according to Fanon, keep increasing their demands and start openly dictating these countries on important national, financial, and security issues. In other words, the present governments or leadership of the postcolonial states are puppets in the hands of the Western world. Fanon warns that if these countries want to survive as free states, they have to give real power to their people; 'the governments should be for the people and by the people, for the outcasts and by the outcasts' (Fanon, 1961). Instead of looking at the international image of the nation, the leaders should focus on the national issues and give dignity to their own citizens and look at issues from a humanitarian perspective.

### **Subalterns in the Nation States**

The origin of the concept of subaltern lies in the discrimination on the basis of racism which originated during colonialism. Morton says that from Ireland to Algeria, from India to Pakistan, and from Jamaica to Mexico, the administrative setup of colonial rulers has always affected the social, cultural, political, and economic structure of the post-colonial nation-states (2003). Along with anti-colonialist academia, such as Fanon (1925-1961) and Chatterjee (1947), Spivak (1988) reveals the political and social injustices of the colonial rule along with exposing the exclusive bourgeois disposition of the colonial nationalists.

Antonio Gramsci was the first to use the term "subaltern" for the voiceless or unrepresented people or groups of any society. Spivak borrows this term from Gramsci, which becomes more significant in the Indian context as these people have a long history of colonial rule and have worked hard for their independence. She chooses the term 'subaltern' as it illustrates the exact image of the people of lower classes. Morton (2003) quotes the words of Spivak:

'I like the word subaltern for one reason. It is totally situational. Subalterns began as a description of a certain rank in the military. The word was under censorship by Gramsci: he called Marxism 'monism', and was obliged to call the proletarian 'subaltern'. That word, used under

duress, has been transformed into the description of everything that doesn't fall under strict class analysis. I like that because it has no theoretical rigor' (*Can the Subaltern Speak?* P. 46).

Pakistan – a land of vitalities and varieties, comprises five provinces and all these provinces are based on various classes, religions, languages, ethnicities, and cultural differences. This dispersed situation makes the subaltern's condition all the more catastrophic.

Spivak presented the theory of subalternity in her most renowned essay *Can the Subaltern Speak?* (1988). In this essay, she explains the limitations faced by the subalterns, asking *Can the Subaltern Speak?* For Spivak subalterns are the oppressed people or more generally people “of inferior rank” (p. 283). According to her, as a product of colonialism, subalterns do not have their own history and they cannot speak (1988). This statement by Spivak has attracted much controversy. Spivak's stance is essentially a straight answer to all the criticisms. It reflects the socio-political circumstances that formulate the idea as well as reveals her constant struggle for truth. The theory proposes that it is not that the subalterns cannot speak or they have never spoken, but the others do not listen to them or rather represent them instead of listening to them.

In this study, the concept of the subaltern is applied to women and religious minority groups, especially the Christian community in Pakistan. The study proves how Nadeem Aslam has portrayed female characters and religious minorities to show that these sections of society do not have any voice in Pakistan. The study also proves how hegemonic power and identity politics of the state play on the binary concept of self/other, good/evil, and superior/inferior. Moreover, it demonstrates how the natives – just for being a religious minority – are treated as inferior beings in their own country.

### *Pakistan's Constitution and Religious Minorities*

Jinnah desired a tolerant and democratic society in Pakistan. He urged authorities to stand beyond religion, caste, and creed in providing all Pakistanis equal rights, benefits, and responsibilities. However, his vision of lawful governments was disillusioned by an increasing dependence on administration instead of governance. The Pakistani elite wanted to create a distinct Muslim identity. This relationship between religion and politics in Pakistan has been shaped mostly by complex historical and social factors. The role of Islam has always been a controversial aspect of Pakistan's political arena. The struggle for the creation of Pakistan on the basis of Islam has made it the most important discourse even in the post-independence period.

Consequently, many regimes used the Islamic factor, for nation-building and for legitimizing their rules. Zulfikar Ali Bhutto's government, in 1973, offered the first Constitution presenting the

parliamentary form of government which is followed to date. However, radical amendments to the Constitution were made by General Zia ul-Haq, succeeding Bhutto. According to Malik (2002), these constitutional revisions impacted Pakistanis' civil rights and resulted in greater socioeconomic segregation of minorities and other disadvantaged groups, such as women. According to the 1998 census, minorities numbered between 11 and 13 million people. Ahmadis, Christians, and Hindus each claim a 4 million-strong population. Punjab is home to the majority of Christians and Sikhs, with fewer than half of Christians living in metropolitan areas.

The constitution, initially, had many sections guaranteeing the rights of religious minorities. For instance, Article 22 (1) protects religious freedom by prohibiting anybody from receiving religious teaching, participating in religious ceremonies, or participating in religious worship if the instruction, ritual, or worship is associated with a faith other than his own. According to Article 33, the government is liable to protect the legitimate rights of minorities and interests, at both the national and provincial levels, they should also have political representation in the public service. While Article 36 ensures minorities' security, Article 40 emphasizes the need of forging strong connections with the Muslim world and promoting worldwide peace. The Eighth Amendment, on the other hand, resulted in significant changes in attitudes and practices toward minorities and women. Many social, political, and human rights advocates have slammed the Zia regime's constitutional revisions, claiming that they are the primary cause of religious minorities' social and political persecution in Pakistan (Malik, 2002).

According to Rais (2015), this law has profound psychological and social implications for religious minorities. Since the law has been approved, over 60 individuals accused of blasphemy were assassinated before their trials were completed (Dawn, August 2013) many famous opponents of the blasphemy legislation have been murdered (BBC News, November 2014). More than sixty people have been killed as a result of blasphemy allegations since 1990 (The Economist, November 2014). The United States Commission on International Religious Freedom (UNCIRF) annual report (2018) reveals that religious minorities in Pakistan are being targeted by banned organizations. The report claims, "In 2017, religious minorities in Pakistan, including Hindus, Christians, Sikhs, and Ahmadis... continued to face attacks and discrimination from extremist groups and society at large" (p. 64). As a result, in recent years, 231 people were killed and 691 injured in such incidents.

### *Religion, Identity, and Politics*

Even after almost seventy-two years, the nature and direction of the representative government is as uncertain as the link between religion and state. Various surveys from political and social sectors have tried to determine whether the nature of the state in Pakistan should be liberal democratic or Islamic. Military leadership, majority political parties, and Islamic forces have tried to explain this phenomenon according to their own understanding of the sovereign states and the role of religion in state affairs and



in society.

In plural societies like Pakistan, the claim for identity and sovereignty on the basis of ethnicity religion, language, and culture has become the most important concern. Social and political scientists have defined politics of identity and the role identity politics play in plural societies; while, others have worked on religious extremism and its impact on religious minorities in Pakistan.

Moreover, the recent interest in the ideas of Islamic extremists in Pakistan has significantly resulted in increased religious and sectarian violence. A sense of exclusion, inferiority, discrimination, insecurity, and fear in religious minorities has resulted from increased Islamic radicalism. Haleem (2003) in his research on ethnic and sectarian violence in Pakistan claims that irresponsible and unaccountable leadership has caused the division of Pakistani society on the basis of ethnic and sectarian differences. He points out that these differences have led to the country's tendency towards Praetorianism, that is direct or indirect military intervention (pp. 463-477). This claim has been supported by many human rights activists who find that the military and intelligence forces are behind almost every major conflict in Pakistan's political arena. This has led to a continued struggle for power in which the politicians, military, and Islamist groups have taken control of the country's politics.

What philosophers and theorists such as Frantz Fanon and Gayatri Spivak said about postcolonial societies, has proven to be true for the most part and reflects their understanding of the political and social phenomena in the post-colonial era. Most diaspora writers have foregrounded these very issues giving voice to the subalterns in these postcolonial states. Some of these authors have been criticized by their contemporary critics who have labeled them as 'native informers' but the fact that these countries do have issues of racial, ethnic and religious controversies and the minorities, especially religious minorities in these states are treated as subalterns is quite evident through the literature produced on these societies as well as the actual situation reported through media.

My study of Nadeem Aslam's *The Golden Legend* (2017) illustrates how in Pakistan, Christian residents are treated as second-class citizens, where the dominant religion and the Islamist government forbid them from taking part in mainstream social, economic, and political activities. While legislation has suppressed their voices, knowledge and truth formation also play a key part in influencing Pakistani society's constrained and undeveloped groups.

### **Research Methodology**

The research is purely designed on a qualitative method and the data collected is secondary, gathered from a variety of sources, including textbooks, research papers, news stories, Human Rights Commission reports, etc. Textual and contextual analysis as a research method is used. The theoretical framework of some aspects of Spivak's *Can the Subaltern Speak?* (1988) is taken for textual analysis. The data is the text itself. The researcher investigates the origins of identity politics and religious minorities' marginalization, as well as the reasons for the hegemonic acceptance of this marginalization

of minority groups, as represented in the novel, via thorough textual and contextual analysis and interpretation.

The idea of 'Subaltern' as articulated in Gayatri Spivak's renowned book *Can the Subaltern Speak?* (1988) serves as the theoretical basis for this research. Because the novel's topic is centered on marginalization based on class, gender, religion, and ethnicity, this theory is important to the research. These divisions do not let them speak up or stand for their rights, as they live at the margins of society. This subjugation of minorities is made possible through power politics in which, according to Spivak, their consciousness is randomly constructed. Through manipulation of knowledge, they are assigned identities; the truth is constructed to play power politics in this marginalization. She also asserts that knowledge is used for manipulation of and thus exclusion of certain groups of society.

### **Textual & Contextual Analysis**

Although Spivak's concept of the "Subalterns" is based on a colonial perspective, this study will apply the said theoretical framework to socio-political aspects and the marginalization of religious and sexual minorities in Pakistan. This study analyzes the novel on the concept of how identity politics is based on power and representation, which uses truth construction and manipulation of knowledge. These identity politics produces negatively marginalized and exclusive identities such as religious, ethnic, sexual, and economic minorities. This proves identity construction is relational to power politics and representation. Identities are formed through discourses and continually distinguished as negative/positive; minor/major; central/marginal.

### ***Identity Politics and Construction of Truth***

For Spivak, Knowledge is never innocent. It expresses the interest of its producer. For Spivak "human consciousness is constructed randomly. We do not construct our identities. We have them written for us" (p. 273). Today the concept of identity politics has become the most influential method through which the majority can desecrate minority rights legally. Politics of identity is Identity centered upon people's views of and interests in various social groupings, as well as their political viewpoints. It includes characteristics of identification that shape political views, such as race, nationality, religion, culture, ethnicity, class, language, and dialect.

The novel *The Golden Legend* (2017) is an effort to present the aspects of identity politics and Islamic extremism in Pakistani society. The author of this novel seems to present this aspect of the theory by revealing how the Christian community has accepted the economic and social marginalization by the government as well as by society at large. Their identity is constructed socially and politically as inferior beings. The incident in which a youngster carries a knife to examine if Helen's (a Christian) blood is black, is the most eloquent evidence of non-Muslim inferiority. Aslam illustrates how the politics of identity that have been instilled in children's minds since childhood have contaminated their brains. It is a culture in which even a young Muslim child recognizes the limits of his non-Muslim connections – "I

am a Muslim; I can't accept a drink from your hand' . . . , 'you should know that shouldn't you?' (p. 24).

The novel exposes the state's illegal passivity in the face of religious extremists' cruelty towards Christians. Aslam mocks Pakistan's culture and legal system in relation to the murder of Grace (a Christian character):

There were several witnesses to the crime, but the Murderer was Muslim and this was Pakistan. . . The man was sentenced to life imprisonment. . . had been released, as a reward for having memorized the entire Koran. He had served less than a year in prison (p. 10).

The narrative also depicts how the blasphemy legislation has been abused, as well as the social and psychological impacts of this legislation on religious minorities. Alice, Bishop Solomon's housemaid, is imprisoned for blasphemy and sentenced to death when her husband Sebastian likes a derogatory statement about Muhammad on Facebook five years earlier. However, Aslam demonstrates that he is discovered hanged less than an hour after returning to his cell following the judgment. The police cover up the murder by claiming that it was a suicide, but they couldn't explain how he killed himself while handcuffed. "The judge had said to Alice's husband, 'you claim to respect and honor Muhammad, peace be upon him. Then why don't you convert to Islam?'" (pp. 312-313). The novel keeps referring to such incidents that happen on daily basis in our society; where the non-Muslims have to strictly observe their own words and behavior lest it might be taken as blasphemy and used against them. They are fully aware that if such incidents occur, they cannot look up to the government for their protection, as the state is usually quiet in such matters because the governments are also manipulated on religious issues.

Aslam also depicts how this state-sponsored hatred against certain countries has penetrated the common people of Pakistan. When Massud enters a shop, he is shocked to find, "At their feet, here and there on the tiles, the national flags of USA, Israel, India, France, and Denmark had been painted. For customers to walk on and defile" (p. 14). This hatred, Aslam emphasizes, is not promoted by the state only but by the religious radicals and extremist groups who have assumed the task of a policeman to impose certain ideas on the masses. Thus, when bishop Solomon is on his way to the court before his death he notices, "there was graffiti on the wall beside him – the word 'Denmark' crossed out emphatically" (p. 326). Similarly, Massud complains, "Yesterday a shopkeeper in Moon Bazaar declined my money unless I write *Jihad is a Duty* or *Implement Strict Sharia Law* on it" (p. 15). Such instances in the novel reveal how people are forced to favor these militant radicals, and how the philosophy of the common masses in Pakistan is different from what is being projected by these forces.

Since the novel is written as a reaction to certain incidents of such religious and sectarian violence in Pakistan, it is important to present the context of the novel (Dawn News, August 2013). According to BBC report, since 1990, over 60 people accused of blasphemy have been murdered before their respective trials were over, and prominent figures who opposed the blasphemy law have been assassinated. While 62 people have been murdered as a result of blasphemy allegations (November, 2014).

The case of Naimat Ahmar, a 45-year-old Christian school teacher in Faisalabad who was stabbed to death by a pupil in 1992, was the first to get widespread notice. The death toll has mounted since then. Manzoor Masih, a blasphemer, was killed at a bus stop in Lahore in April 1994. A police officer assigned to keep an eye on Samuel Masih in the hospital killed him in 2003. Jagdish Kumar, a manufacturing worker in Karachi, was lynched to death by his coworkers in April 2008. For the record, many Muslims have faced mob punishment, including Mashal Khan, a student from Mardan, who was killed in April 2016 (Yousuf Zohra, 2016).

The worst assault against Christians, in which at least 83 people were killed in a double suicide bombing in Peshawar in September 2013, is one example of mobs being incited to attack entire districts of Christians. After Sawan Masih, a resident of the colony was accused of blasphemy, hundreds of protestors burned a fire in more than 200 houses belonging to Christians in Joseph Colony in March of the same year (The Economist, November 2014). Asia Bibi, a Christian lady, was convicted seven years ago of uttering blasphemous statements. In March 2016, a suicide bomber blasted through the parking space of a packed park in Lahore where Christians were enjoying Easter Sunday, killing at least 72 people and wounding more than 300 (The Economist, November 2014).

In spite of all these atrocities against the Christian minorities, they have contributed a lot to the social sector development of Pakistan by having built splendid educational institutions, hospitals, and health facilities throughout the country. They have been peaceful even in the face of the worst provocation.

### ***Subalterns in Pakistan***

The origins of the term “subaltern” may be traced back to racial prejudice, which originated with colonization. Spivak uses Gramsci's word “subaltern” to describe the underrepresented section of individuals in society. The term “subaltern” takes on new meaning in the Indian cultural setting, as the people had fought hard for freedom.

Spivak proposes the theory of Subalternity in her most celebrated essay *Can the Subaltern Speak?* (1988). In this essay, she details the limitations of the subalterns; by ‘subaltern’ Spivak means the oppressed subjects or more generally those “of inferior rank” (p. 283). She goes on to add that “In the context of colonial production, the subaltern has no history and cannot speak (p. 287). This statement by Spivak has attracted much controversy. Spivak’s remark is essentially a single, unambiguous response to all of the questions. It is the result of her never-ending search for the truth, and it is based on socio-cultural backdrops. According to the notion, the underclass has the ability to communicate, but others lack the patience or capability to listen to them.

In this study, the concept of the subaltern is applied to women and religious minority groups, especially the Christian community in Pakistan. The study proves that these sections of society do not have any voice in Pakistan.

The definition of subaltern applies to the characters in *The Golden Legend* (2017), like Ayesha – the Cleric’s daughter – who is widowed at the age of thirty-one is not allowed to remarry by her brother-in-law, who is a religious militant and for whom the widow of the martyr should never remarry. “She had to remain untainted . . .” (p. 57). No one is ready to accept the fact that she might be interested in getting married again; not even her own father realizes that she might be in love with someone. Nargis (Wife of Massud, a Christian pretending to live as a Muslim); after realizing in her early childhood that she cannot have a secure future being a Christian. Helen (daughter of Lily and Grace), ‘At the beginning of high school, when she was fourteen years old, a teacher had asked her to stand up in class and “justify taking the place of a Muslim (in school)” (p. 23).

Lily (Helen’s father) who has been maltreated all his life and who refuses to waste his life in sewers, becomes a rickshaw driver and lets a mobile phone company install a signal tower in his house to increase his income is mocked by his Muslim landlord ‘You think you’ll climb that tower all the way to Paradise?’ Now he gave a small laugh: “sweeping and cleaning is too lowly a job for you. Mr. Big-shot Rickshaw Driver is leaving for work in the morning. . . .’ (p. 47)

These examples in the novel demonstrate how members of the Christian community are treated as second-class citizens in Pakistan, where the majority religion and the Islamist government refuse to allow them to participate in the mainstream social, economic, and political arena. In fact, these people are treated the same as Dalits are treated in India. Helen, for instance, in the novel, reflects that “She was a child and it thrilled her when on the second day she realized she didn’t necessarily have to carry her own glass, cup, and spoon with her. No one said she smelled faintly of sewage. No one asked her when she intended to convert to the Only True Religion” (p. 190). Similarly, when her sister Seraphina is taken into police custody along with her colleagues, on suspicion of a robbery, she is the only one detained for the whole night, while others were let free after the initial investigation “At midnight only Seraphina remained in detention. It did not escape his notice that she was the only Christian” (p. 191). When her uncle comes to the police station to free Seraphina and asks the police to let him use the phone “... he was told that they could not allow him to touch the instrument” (p. 192).

As a result, the novel shows that Spivak’s idea of Subalternity is still applicable, as individuals suffer because of their gender, class, or faith. Because the only constant in the world is changing, the subalterns must continue to make their stance known to the authorities. Only until the authorities pay attention to the subalterns’ cries will they be able to fully appreciate the new dawn of life.

### **Conclusion and Recommendations**

The textual and contextual study of the novel proves that Pakistan still has a long fight ahead for the proper abolition of sectarian and religious violence. Religious and sectarian violence is more a state and power group phenomenon that is deputized by the commoners in Pakistan. For certain political benefits and power hunger, the psyche of the masses is manipulated, resulting in the incidents and

behavior towards subalterns depicted in the novel as well as in the real world. Pakistan has to become a country where the rights of every citizen irrespective of caste, creed, religious, or political affiliations are fully protected and each citizen has equal rights and respect as a Pakistani national. Although, the constitution of Pakistan and Islam provides these rights to every citizen the masses need to be educated to let go of the differences.

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